


Article

Urban Regeneration and Touristification in the Sardinian Capital City of Cagliari, Italy

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Abstract: Regeneration agendas and inbound tourism flows have long been considered a remedy for economic crisis. In port cities, a prominent role in urban regeneration is played by the waterfronts, which have been undergoing radical makeovers worldwide since the 1960s. The city of Cagliari stuck to the same recipe, promoting a series of regeneration initiatives and implementing a series of policies to boost the tourism sector. This study combines the use of primary and secondary sources and the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data to create a useful picture of both current reality and historical development of the city. It demonstrated that development strategies promoted in Cagliari, rather than balancing tourism promotion and local community needs, contributed to the amplification and acceleration of the touristification process. Therefore, many of the challenges posed by overtourism, dread in the literature, are today faced by Cagliari and its inhabitants. In addition, the study also identifies in the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic a unique opportunity to reverse the touristification process and to achieve a sustainable manner of tourism development. Therefore, it offers some policy recommendations to define principled urban regeneration models, alternatives which are able to achieve urban revitalization while avoiding touristification.

Keywords: urban tourism; overtourism; gentrification; historic city center; right to the city



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1. Introduction

Regeneration agendas and inbound tourism flows have long been considered a remedy for economic crisis [1,2]; physical urban beautification and immaterial cultural resources are commonly integrated to attract people and capital [3]. By analyzing the relationships between urban regeneration and tourism, Judd and Fainstein [4] noticed the tendency to create “tourism bubbles” where a high number of tourist attractions are crowded together. This is particularly evident in historic city centers, where the high concentration of heritage and cultural elements [5] as well as a large part of the retail and accommodation business [6] promotes urban vitality and preserves the city’s authenticity [7].

In port cities, a prominent role in urban regeneration is played by the waterfront, as the presence of the port increases the power of attraction of the city [8]. For this reason, a series of waterfront regeneration projects have proliferated all over the world since the 1960s [8,9], and Cagliari is not an exception [10–12]. However, to be successful, these initiatives need to be flanked by regeneration projects of the historic city centers proximate to the port [13]. Aware of the interconnected roles of the port and of the historic city center behind it, the port authority and the local Council of Cagliari implemented synergic development strategies that helped to boost tourism [12,13].

The implemented regeneration projects have produced the desired results, as the city has enjoyed a significant increase in tourist influx, providing considerable benefits to the local economy. Unfortunately, though, every rose has its thorn; former residents of the historic city center are encountering increasing difficulties in living their neighborhood and their quality of life is relentlessly deteriorating. This is in line with the problems

faced by other cities worldwide that experience high levels of tourist intensity and visitor pressure [7,14–20].

On the one hand, urban tourism creates new employment opportunities and stimulates local economic growth; on the other hand, it poses significant challenges to the fulfillment of residents' needs [21]. Tourism constitutes one of the city's main economic drivers, and thus it is expected to guide the city's development, bring vitality and dynamism, ensure better infrastructure, provide better public services, increase employment, and improve the quality of life of its residents, [21] WTO 2012, but it actually often worsens residents' living conditions [22], determining social tensions [20,23–26], and causing the displacement of former residents [27–30].

There is plenty of literature analyzing the impacts of tourism on cities worldwide [31–33]. Initial studies praised tourism's positive effects [34], but, within a short time, a large number of studies identified pressing problems related to unbridled tourism growth [35]. In 2005 Gotham introduced the concept of tourism gentrification to draw attention to tourism activities as new drivers of gentrification [36,37]. The term “touristification,” which combines the words “tourism” and “gentrification”, rapidly became popular among scholars [38–42] to indicate the production of space for tourist purpose, implicating the change of the essence of entire neighborhoods [43,44]. An extraordinary number of papers accurately describe the characteristics of the touristification processes and related consequences for cities around the world [37–39,45–50].

Nonetheless, only a small amount of research investigates the interrelationship between urban planning and tourism development [51]. This study responds to this gap by offering an empirical contribution to the academic debate concerning urban regeneration and touristification through an analysis of the case study of Cagliari (Sardinia, Italy), one never conducted before, which enquires whether regeneration programs developed in the city secured improved living conditions for everyone, or, rather, encouraged touristification. This contribution extends the knowledge of touristification, thanks to the interpretation of the phenomena observed, which conducts to the identification of the underlying dynamics and contextual conditions that determine touristification, allowing for the formulation of explanations that go beyond the peculiarities of this case study, and providing insights on a wider touristification phenomena. The aim is to identify principled urban regeneration models, which are resistant to speculative pressures in order to simultaneously achieve urban revitalization and avoid touristification processes. For this reason, the paper zooms out from the results of this site-specific case study to a wider perspective to offer strategic policies recommendations to local governments, local communities and the private sector, encouraging the shape of vibrant neighborhoods, welcoming and livable, for both residents and tourists.

The analysis is divided into six sections. In the first one, an introduction to the topic is provided; in the second one, the existing literature is reviewed; in the third one, essential information about the case study is provided; in the fourth one, the comprehensive multi-method approach specifically tailored for this study is illustrated; in the fifth one, results are presented; in the sixth one, results are discussed and conclusions are drawn, together with the report of contributions and limitations of the study and suggestions and recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Review

This section critically reviews existing knowledge on urban regeneration and touristification to provide the rationale behind this study and to help to address the research question of whether regeneration programs secure improved living conditions for everyone, or, rather, if they encourage touristification.

According to the 2030 Agenda, since tourism is strictly related to assets such as urban infrastructure, accessibility, and cultural and natural heritage, it can promote regeneration, thus providing safe, affordable, resilient, smarter, and greener cities for both tourists and residents [52]. At the turn of the millennium in southern Europe, urban and cultural policies were aiming for tourism to revitalize historic districts, which, once redeveloped,

would attract more tourists [39]. Tourism, culture, leisure, and entertainment assumed central roles in urban regeneration by boosting local reputation, raising property values, encouraging investments and creating new jobs [53–55]. Moreover, tourism-oriented urban regeneration is more efficient in generating surplus value than the traditional model of urban redevelopment [56]. Therefore, cities worldwide have committed wholeheartedly to marketing themselves [57], registering a dramatic increase in the number of tourists in the last two decades [58]. Indeed, apart from the recent recession caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic [18], yearly growth rates of tourism have exceeded those of most other sectors [59]. The strong increase in the number of visitors has made tourism filter into urban areas that had so far been unharmed by touristification processes [2]. Consequently, cities, and particularly their historic centers, have been adapted for tourist amusement and investors' profit, transforming them into "leisure-oriented consumption arena(s)" [56] and destinations for mass tourism [60]. The concept of touristification shares many features with that of gentrification, but they substantially differ from one another, because tourists do not replace the resident population in the long term, due to their temporary stay [39].

Nevertheless, several studies associate touristification processes with a series of negative impacts on the physical, social and economic environment of the destination [33,61]. McKinsey and WTTC [62] distinguish five challenges: alienation of local residents, degradation of the tourist experience, overload of infrastructure, damage to nature, and risks to culture and heritage. Moscardo and Murphy [63] (2014: 2539) list "inflation, increases in housing prices, loss of social networks, an influx of temporary strangers, increased crime, and tourists demonstrating undesirable behavior to local children". Koens and Postma [33] report that visitors exacerbate the already pressing issues in the city, such as lack of water and waste disposal, and that residents' quality of life is infringed by tourists' antisocial behavior, noise, and a general sense of insecurity. Alexandri and Janoschka [64] highlight that annoyance easily evolves into a sense of unhoming. Diaz-Parra and Jover [65] admonish against the loss of authenticity and the ruination of the pleasure of living in and visiting the city.

Koens and Melissen [66] link the process of touristification with reductions in housing availability and facilities for residents. Cocola-Gant and Gago [28] underline the sense of loss and frustration experienced by local communities and the compromise of their quality of life, undermined by daily disruption. Gössling et al. [67] add the privatization of public places, high tourist-to-resident ratios and commercial gentrification. Peeters et al. [68] identify a series of impacts of overtourism and classify them into three categories: environmental, economic, and socio-cultural. In the environmental category, they catalogue increased water, land, air, noise, and visual pollution, waste disposal problems, infrastructure congestion, overcrowding, and damage to natural, historical, and architectural sites. In the economic category, they list price inflation, reductions in the availability of goods and services, a strong impact of seasonality, the degradation of sectors of employment other than tourism, increases in infrastructure-maintenance costs, reductions in infrastructure accessibility, and the degradation of the destination's image. In the socio-cultural category, they include infrastructure degradation, deterioration of residential areas, marginalization of the residential population, higher levels of hostility between visitors and residents, increased antisocial behaviors, and degradation of the sense of safety, together with modification of recreational areas, relinquishment of traditions and values, and a decline in morals, thus ultimately losing community spirit, pride, and cultural identity. Sari and Nazli [69], in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, add the risk of contagious disease.

Furthermore, Morris [70] highlights the changes brought about by tourism in the pre-pandemic area, which concern not only the physical aspect of the city, but also its citizens' daily lives and their sense of relations, thus affecting the cultural identity of the place itself. For example, small businesses predominantly selling their products and services to local communities, such as markets, butchers' shops, bakeries, hair salons, bookshops, etc., have been pushed-out from the center [71] and their stores have been turned into kitsch souvenir shops [72]. Accordingly, the working population has left agricultural and manufacturing jobs and flocked to hospitality- and tourism-related positions, altering thereby its compo-

sition and identity [73]. This transformation has been encouraged by web-based digital platforms of peer-to-peer exchange services for hospitality, which stimulate an explosive growth of the offer of private rented accommodations [33], thus encouraging the transfer of properties from the residential market to the more profitable tourism market [74]. Indeed, since landlords find short term rentals more attractive than long-term ones, they substitute for tenants with tourists [28], thus increasing the quota of tourists in the residential population [67]. The conversion from the residential to the tourism market determines both a decrease in housing supply [67] and the consequent increase in rental pressure, which results in an increase in real estate values and rents [75]. The inevitable outcomes are gentrification, displacement and segregation of former inhabitants [30,76], which leads to population decline [77]. Celata and Romano [78] argue that the spread of web-based short-term rental booking platforms plays a crucial role in residents' displacement and in the transformation of city-morphology. In addition, some scholars suggest that web-based digital platforms of peer-to-peer exchange services for hospitality might disrupt the traditional accommodation sector [79], particularly undermining B&Bs and hotels due to its impact on their occupancy rates [80] and, consequently, on room rates [81].

3. The Study's City

Cagliari is the capital city of the Italian region of Sardinia (Figure 1). It is located on the northern extremity of the Gulf of Cagliari, on the south coast of Sardinia, the second largest Italian island, located in the western part of the Mediterranean Sea. The city covers an area of 86.05 km² [82], has a population of 151,812 inhabitants [83], and has a population density of 1764 people per square kilometer [84].

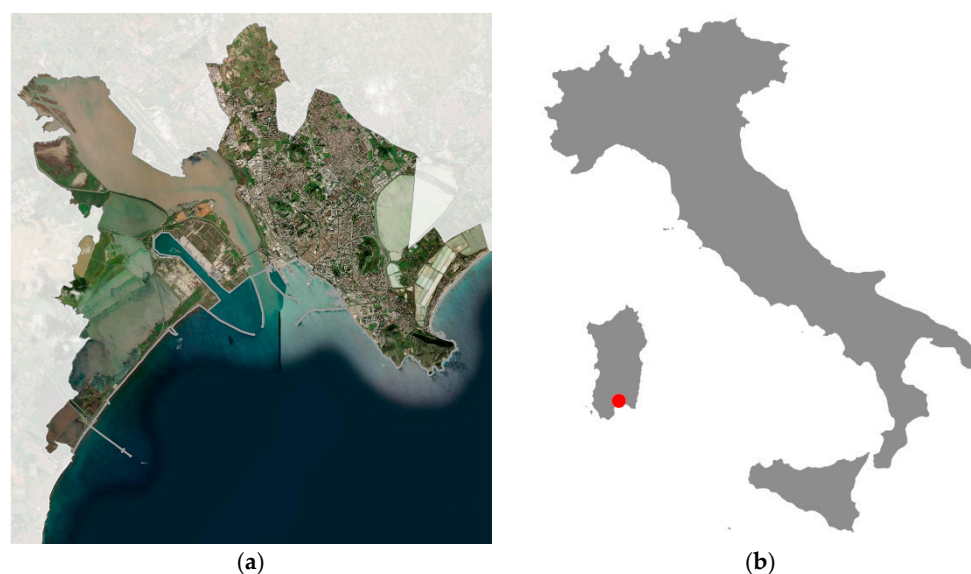


Figure 1. The city of Cagliari: (a) aerial view of the municipal territory; and (b) the location (red dot) of Cagliari within Sardinia, Italy.

The nearby international airport of Elmas connects the city with major Italian and European cities [85] and, since June 2023, also with Dubai, United Arab Emirates [86]. In addition, the port of Cagliari connects the city with Rome-Civitavecchia, Genova, Palermo, and Naples [85]; it is also port of call of numerous cruises in the Mediterranean [87] and, since April 2023, it will be home port of cruises in the Mediterranean as well [88].

The landscape is characterized by the ridge of the seven hills, where human settlements are built, and several natural protected areas which surround the built environment, encompassing the Molentargius Saline Regional Natural Park, the Santa Gilla Lagoon, the Poetto tower, Mount Saint Elia, Cala Mosca and Cala Fighera [12].

A picturesque view of the city welcomes tourists who arrive by sea (Figure 2), inviting them to wander its narrow, cobbled streets, gazing at its historic buildings and churches and tasting traditional food and local wine in characterful cafes and restaurants.



Figure 2. View of the city from the sea.

Its historic city center is constituted by four historic districts (Figure 3): *Castello*, *La Marina*, *Villanova* and *Stampace* [89], studded with imposing churches, impressive buildings, historic monuments and panoramic terraces.



Figure 3. The four historic districts of Cagliari [90].

Castello is the oldest district of Cagliari, and stands on a limestone hill, fortified with towers, bastions, and curtain walls (Figures 4 and 5).



Figure 4. Fortifications in Cagliari: (a) Elephant's tower; (b) Saint Pancrazio's tower.

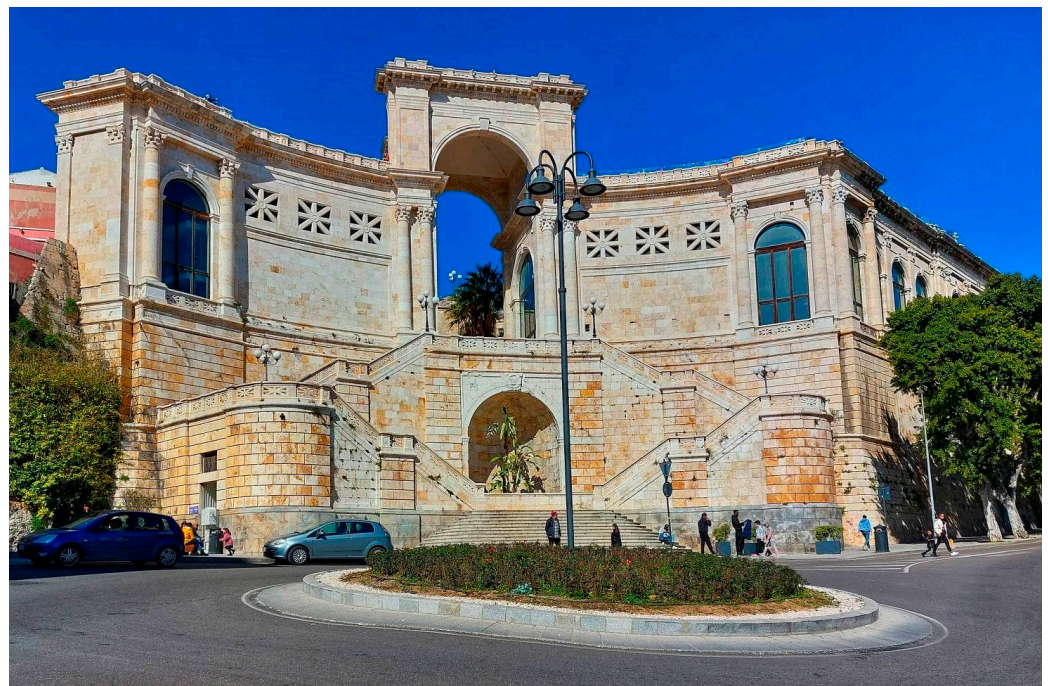


Figure 5. Fortification in Cagliari: Saint Remy's Bastion.

Since *Castello* was once the residence of the exiled Italian royal family and of local nobles, it hosts fine and imposing buildings (Figure 6), such as the Royal Palace, where the Savoy family lived between 1799 and 1815, Boyle's Palace, and Sanjust's Palace.



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 6. Landmark buildings in Castello: (a) the Royal Palace; (b) Boyle's Palace; and (c) Sanjust's Palace.

In addition, there are numerous religious buildings, the most important of which is the Cathedral of Santa Maria (Figure 7), where touching religious celebrations are held on 15th August [91]. Six extra churches are located in the district, in addition to the Jesuit College, today home to the Faculty of Architecture, and to the College of the Scolopi, currently occupied by the art high school [92].



Figure 7. Cathedral of Santa Maria.

Moreover, between the Middle Ages and the beginning of the 20th century, *Castello* was the hearth of Cagliari political life, which centered around the Former City Hall, currently a location for temporary exhibitions (Figure 8) [93].



Figure 8. Former City Hall.

In 1896 the City Hall was transferred to a new building (Figure 9), located in *La Marina district* [93], where it still is headquartered.

La Marina is the historic district that overlooks the port of the city. It grew through the mere accretion of buildings, churches and warehouses (Figure 10), without organic arrangements, whose sole purpose was to respond to the needs of the port [94]. The upshot is the maze of alleys, which is still walkable today.

The only exceptions are the two-way streets with sidewalks on both sides that delimit the district, *Largo Carlo Felice*, which separates *La Marina* from *Stampace*, via *Roma*, which separates *La Marina* from the sea, and *Viale Regina Elena*, which separates *La Marina* from *Villanova* (Figure 11).

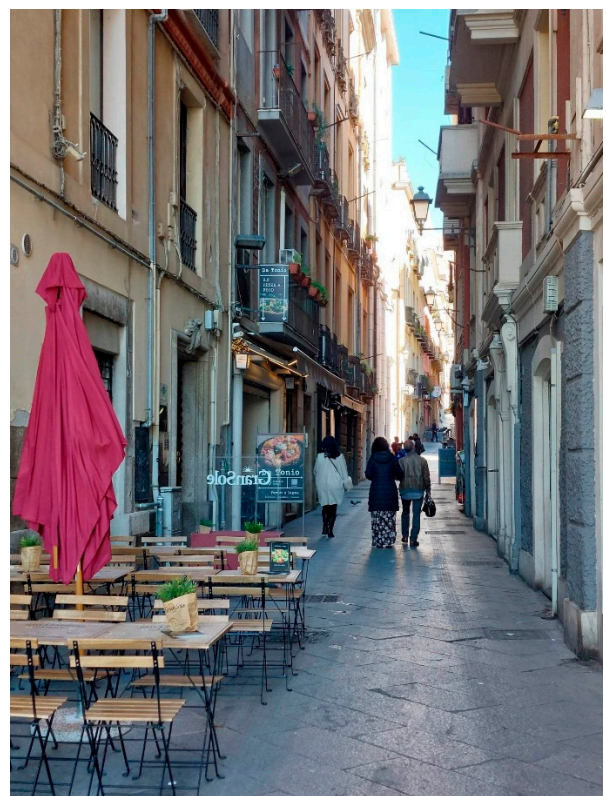
Landmarked buildings (Figure 12) in *La Marina* include the Municipal Auditorium, which once was the Church of Saint Therese [95], the Aragonese Church of Saint Eulalia [96] and the Scala di Ferro, the luxury hotel of the second half of the XIX century and of the first half of the XX century, where several international personages, such as the English writer David Herbert Lawrence and the Italian actor Antonio De Curtis, spent some nights [97].



Figure 9. City Hall.



(a)



(b)

Figure 10. Characteristic streets in *La Marina*: (a) Naples Street; and (b) Barcelona Street.



Figure 11. Streets surrounding *La Marina*: (a) Via Roma; (b) Largo Carlo Felice; and (c) Viale Regina Elena.



Figure 12. Landmarked buildings in *La Marina*: (a) Municipal Auditorium; (b) Church of Saint Eulalia; and (c) Scala di Ferro.

Villanova was once inhabited by farmers and families from the surrounding countryside and subsequently by artisans who opened their workshops here [98,99]. Nowadays, after the regeneration project realized by the Municipality of Cagliari and by the private investor Nicola Grauso in 2010, it is the trendiest district in the city, characterized by colorful row houses and narrow streets studded with luxury boutiques, stylish cafes and modern restaurants (Figure 13) [100].



Figure 13. Images from *Villanova*: (a) Sulis Street; (b) a bookshop; and (c) a brasserie.

Among the landmarked buildings of Villanova there are the primary school “Albero Riva”, built at the beginning of the XX century and still operating; Palazzo Valdés, a liberty-style residential building; and the ExMa, the ex-slaughterhouse that has been renamed “Exhibiting and Moving Arts” to indicate its new end use as exhibition center of contemporary art (Figure 14) [101–103].



Figure 14. Landmarked buildings in Villanova: (a) primary school; (b) Palazzo Valdés; and (c) ExMa.

Stampace is particularly vibrant at the end of April and the beginning of May, when the patron saint’s festival is organized. It takes place from the 1st of May to the 4th of May, and it is the most important religious festival of the island, celebrated every year without interruption since 1652 [104]. The Saint’s statue is carried from the church of Saint Efisio, located in Sant’Efisio Street in *Stampace*, to the church of Saint Efisio located in the 4-kms-away village of Nora, passing through the streets of *Stampace* among jubilant devotees (Figure 15) [104].

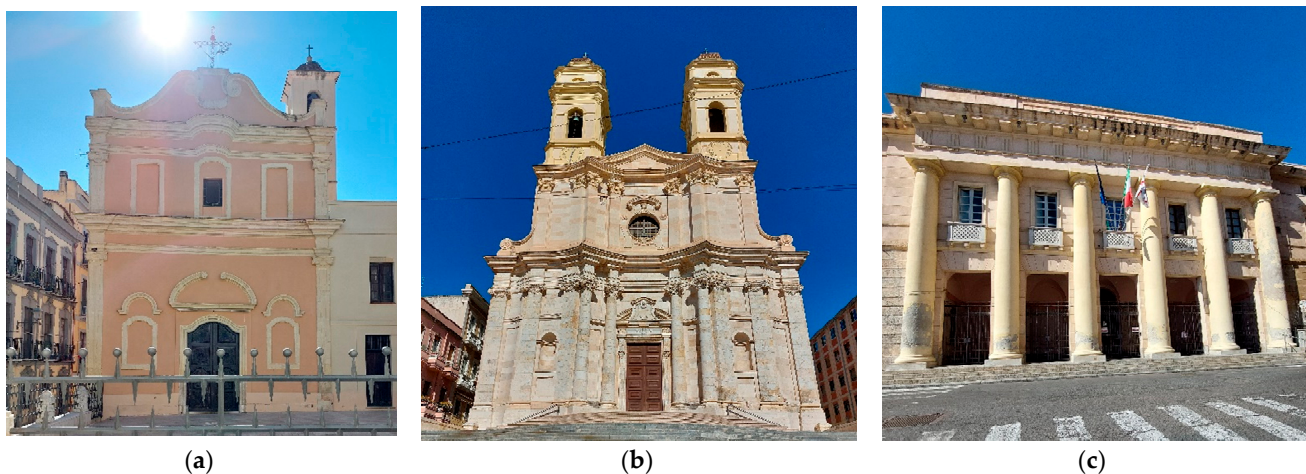


Figure 15. Landmarked buildings in Villanova: (a) Church of Saint Efisio in *Stampace*; (b) Collegiata di Sant’Anna Church; and (c) Civil hospital.

4. Materials and Methods

This study examines the policies implemented in Cagliari to boost the tourism sector and the observable changes, both in the physical aspects of the city and in the socio-economic characteristics of the local community. Existing similar studies are reviewed to tailor a methodology for this case study.

Cocola-Gant [43] explores how residents in the city center of Barcelona feel about the tourism-led transformation of their place through participant observation, the conducting of 56 in-depth interviews with residents and key-informants and a survey of 220 households.

Amrhein et al. [14] interviewed 12 representatives of the anti-overtourism movement in the Balearic Island of Mallorca to understand impacts determined by overtourism. Ardura et al. [105] demonstrate the correlation between increases in tourist arrivals and in new wealth residents in Madrid and rising rents. Jover and Díaz-Parra [39] investigate the social impacts of tourism on the historic center of Seville through the analysis of demographic changes. Cocola-Gant and Gago [28] consult the Short-Term Rental National Register and the website Airdna.co to verify the number of listings and their type (i.e., entire home, private room, shared room). In addition, they conducted 25 in-depth interviews with residents and key informants and concluded that a buy-to-let gentrification process is in progress in Lisbon.

This research adopts an empirical approach which combines the use of primary and secondary sources and the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data to allow the creation of a useful picture of both the historical development of the city and its current reality.

Firstly, a wide range of bibliographic sources, press materials, and official documents was examined (i.e., the Local Plan, the Port plan and its technical adaptations, the Plan for the historic center, the new Plan for the historic center) to become familiar with the process of regeneration promoted by the local council.

Secondly, quantitative data available from official secondary sources was interpreted to understand the economic and social trends. Longitudinal analysis was conducted on quantitative data published by the Municipality of Cagliari, which gathered various data sources. In particular, data on population trends, household composition, foreign citizens, the labor market, the business fabric, tourists' arrivals and nights spent in Cagliari, cruise passengers embarked, disembarked, and in transit in Cagliari, ferry passengers arrived in Cagliari, airplane passengers arrived in and departed from Cagliari, and the number of registered companies in different business sectors were considered. In addition, longitudinal analysis was also conducted on the trends in the supply of different types of tourist accommodation in Cagliari between 2013 and 2021, on the basis of data provided by the Observatory of Tourism, Craft Trades and Commerce of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia. Furthermore, data on active rentals, rental types, and occupancy rates from the website Airdna.co were examined.

Thirdly, qualitative data was collected, thanks to the participation in the community meeting held on 11 November 2022. In this way, it was possible to get in contact with residents by holding informal conversations and to get to know local representatives by holding one-to-one, in-depth, open-ended interviews.

5. Results

5.1. Tourism as Development Strategy

Since the 1970s, the Mediterranean coastal areas have been focusing their development strategy on tourism [106]. In the Italian island of Sardinia, in the western part of the Mediterranean Sea, tourism was identified as the right vehicle to create a flourishing regional economy as early as the 1920s [107]. Hence, the provincial Councils of Cagliari and Sassari and the association for tourism development in Southern Italy organized the "Sardinian Spring", an initiative to promote local art, handcraft, floriculture, and traditional festivals [108]. On this occasion, the Italian national body of the tourist industry and the Italian national railways published a leaflet, wherein the lidos equipped for heliotherapeutic treatment in the long seashore of Cagliari are showcased as the safest and most effective in Italy [108]. In 1950 the Sardinian body of the tourist industry (Ente sardo industrie turistiche—ESIT) was established in order to create favorable framework-conditions for the flowering of the tourism industry [109]. Among its initiatives, the construction of several modern hotels, both in the coastal and inner areas of the island, exerted a powerful positive impact on the regional tourism industry [110]. Tourism was already identified as the most promising industry of the island, an even better one than the traditional extractive industry [111] and, at this point, the idea that tourism can almost be the only economic resource of the region is uncontroversial [112]. Accordingly, the regional council

is constantly working on the promotion of the island at international fairs, and on the diversification of the touristic offering to make Sardinia an attractive tourism destination all-year-round [113,114]. Within this framework, the municipality of Cagliari established a Destination Management Organization, constituted by both local and international partners who collaborate to identify the best strategies to promote the city in national and international markets [115].

Like most port cities, which have focused their efforts in beautifying their waterfront and in regenerating their historic centers with the aim of attracting shipping companies and/or cruise companies [116–118], the city of Cagliari carried out a series of regeneration projects and many more will be realized in the near future.

Towards the turn of the century and in the new millennium, Cagliari followed the general trend of southern European cities, working towards a tourism increase and redeveloping the waterfront of the historic city center [119]. The local plan implemented in 2002 [120] symbolically defines itself as a “strategy for the tourist city (strategia per la città turistica)”, referring to the fact the its entire program aims at fostering city tourism [121]. It considers the enhancement of the waterfront the most important theme for the city’s future and, also, the main trigger of urban revitalization of the historic center [122]. It redefines the relationship between the old port and the facing historic district through a series of interventions (Figure 16):

- The destination of the central part of the port in front of the historic district of *La Marina* to cruise ships, pleasure yachts and recreational boats;
- The realization of a new waterfront;
- The elimination of the vehicle traffic; only local residents and public transport are authorized to drive through;
- The realization of a big pedestrian piazza to connect the historic city center with sea;
- The regeneration of the historic district *La Marina*;
- The restyle of the *Piazza Matteotti* [122].

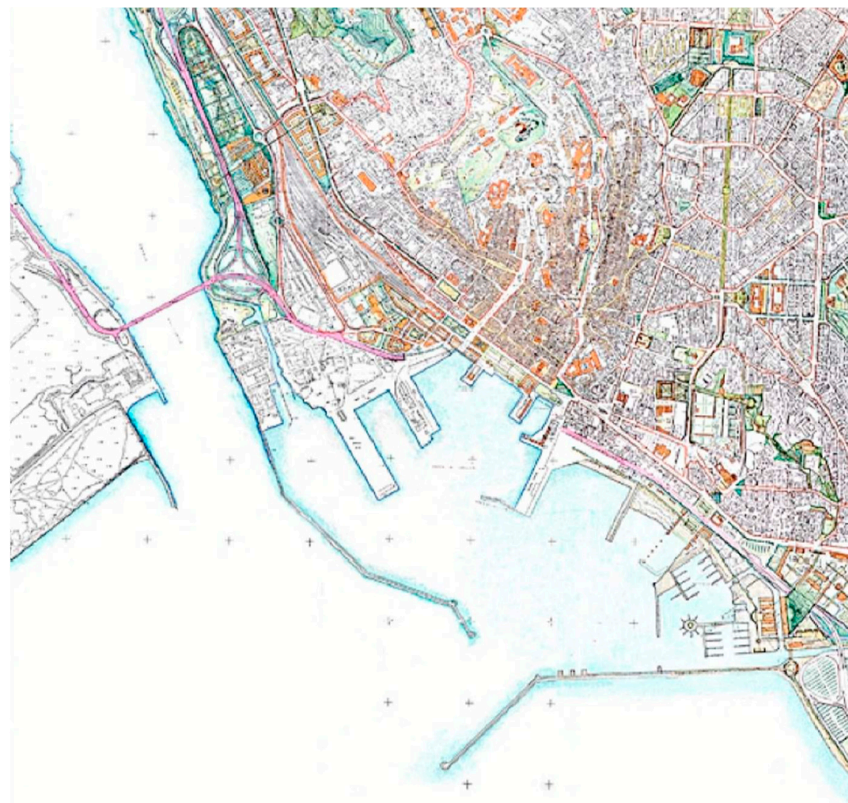


Figure 16. The project of the old port area and of the facing historic city center [123].

Coherently, a new port development plan, approved in 2010 [11], details the interventions defined for the marine area (Figure 17). It divides the area of the old port into six zones that are transformed as illustrated below [124]:

- Zone A: a touristic port suitable for approximately 2200 pleasure yachts and recreational boats, nautical services, sporting activities, recreational and commercial facilities for tourists and catering services;
- Zone B: a pine grove for tourism and recreational purposes and a flexible use of the water area that can be a water park or a docking for a limited number of yachts;
- Zone C: a cruise terminal, a multi-purpose building and an underground multistorey parking garage.
- Zone D: This is the most interesting port area, due to its historic importance and to its direct relations with the surrounding urban structures. Therefore, this is the area that is transformed the most, to dock approximately 300 pleasure yachts and recreational boats. A road tunnel connects the east side to the west side, freeing the via Roma from vehicle traffic and an underground multistorey parking garage holds 600 cars.
- Zone E: passenger terminal, Ro-Ro mixed freight and passenger terminal, a new marine station, maneuvering and parking areas, a multi-purpose building;
- Zone F: Harbor Master's office, mooring of fishing vessels, structures for professional fishing related activities and fresh fish retail.

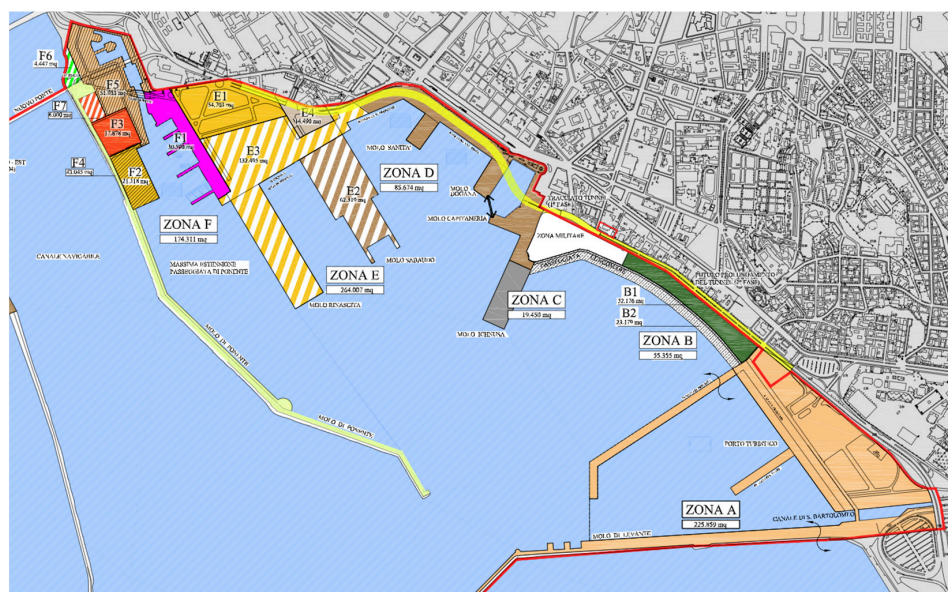


Figure 17. The interventions planned in the port area [125].

Similarly, the plan for the historic center details the interventions defined for the terrestrial area. It [12] defines the following actions:

- Urban quality improvement to retain existing residents;
- Attraction of new residents;
- Incentivization of university student presence;
- Enhancement of cultural and natural resources;
- Increase of tourist flows;
- Restoration of big public and private buildings;
- Public infrastructure investments;
- Redevelopment of the waterfront of the historic city.

Some technical adaptations were made to the port plan in 2019 and 2020, but they do not change the strategic choices and the functional destinations identified in the plan [126].

In 2015 a new plan for the historic center was approved. It harks back to the 2002 local plan, to the 2010 port plan and to the old plan for the historic center; it finds in the port area a golden opportunity to boost the development of the city. The new plan for the historic center renames the district La Marina the “Flavor district” (translated by the author from the Italian “Distretto del gusto”) in view of the presence of numerous bars, pubs, restaurants and pizzerias and takes it as a development model for the city.

5.2. Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics

According to the last demographic atlas published by the Municipality of Cagliari [83], the Cagliarian population has constantly decreased over the last 19 years. However, the historic districts have not followed this general trend, and have maintained their constant populations (Figure 18).

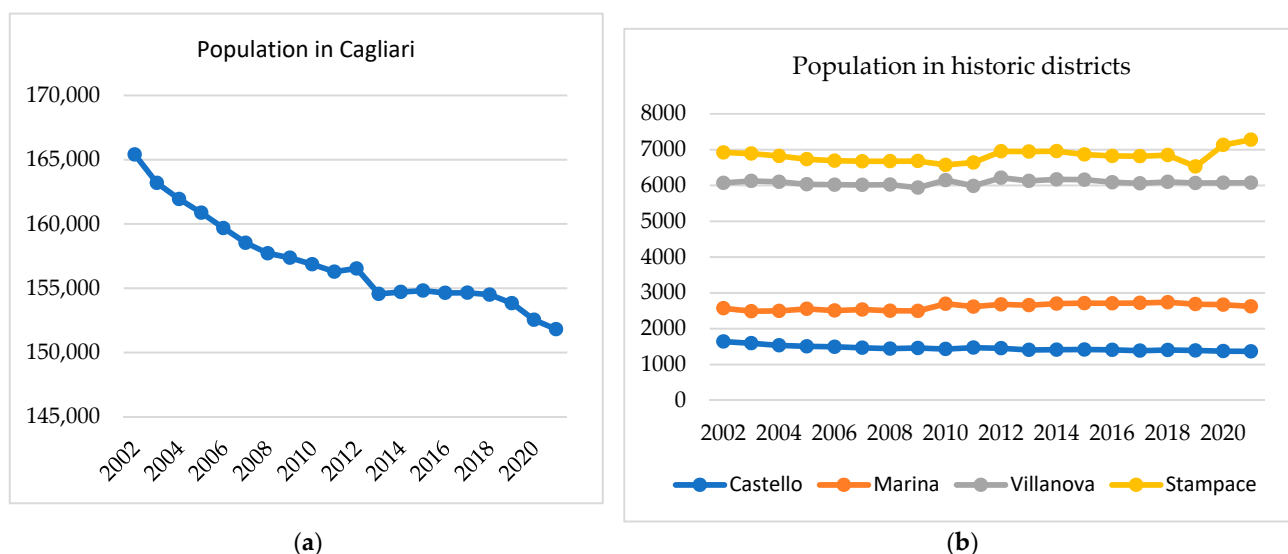


Figure 18. Population trends: (a) Cagliari; and (b) historic districts [83].

In the city there are 77,852 households, of which 48% are constituted by singles and 26% are constituted by couples [83]. Numerous families are few in number; households with five or more members are less than 2.80% of the total [83] (Figure 19).

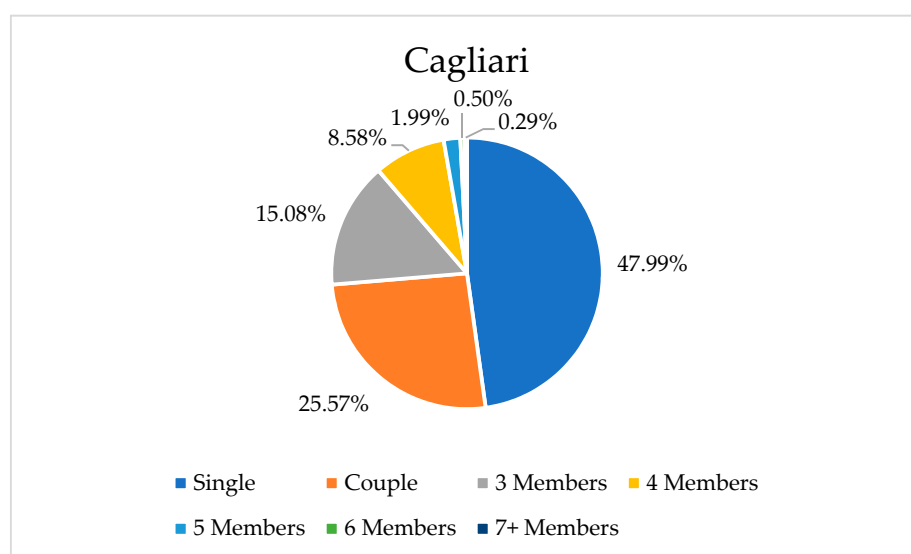


Figure 19. Household composition in Cagliari [83].

In historic districts, the percentages of singles are higher than the city mean, while percentages of numerous families are lower (Figure 20) [83].

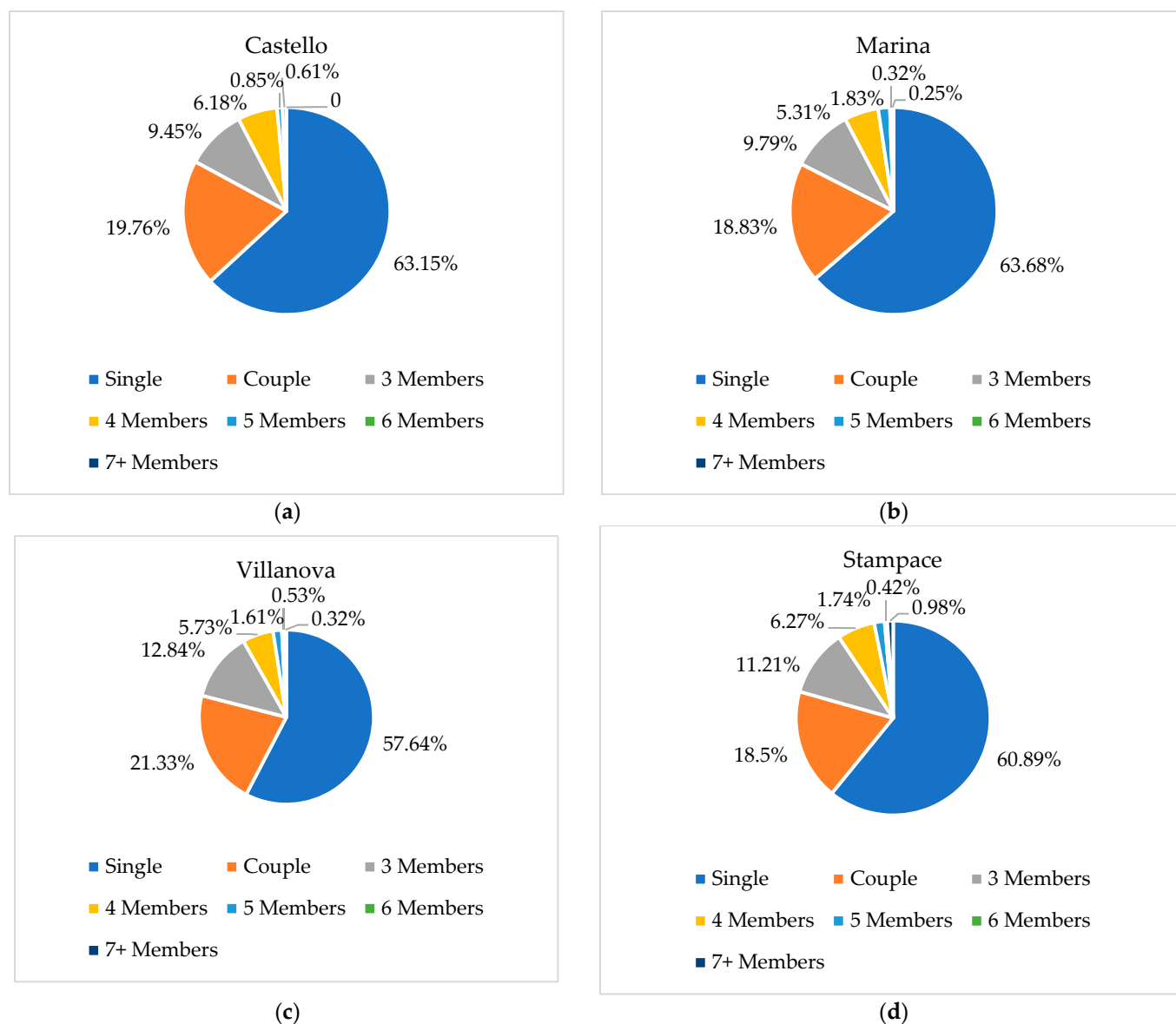


Figure 20. Household composition in historic districts in Cagliari: (a) *Castello*; (b) *Marina*; (c) *Villanova*; and (d) *Stampace* [83].

Foreign citizens have dramatically increased in number in the last 19 years, and their presence is especially concentrated in the historic districts of *Villanova*, *Marina* and *Stampace*, where their rate is higher than the average value of the city [83]. Almost half of foreign residents come from Asia, approximately 30% are European, 18% are African and almost 5% are American.

The labor market is characterized by high levels of unemployment, particularly among youngsters [82]. The business fabric is mainly constituted by wholesale and retail companies, which employ the highest number of workers. The subsequent relevant sector is constituted by professional activities [82]. The building, healthcare, and HORECA sectors are important as well, even if sensibly less than the leading two sectors [82].

5.3. Tourism Statistics

Tourism statistics show the same upward trend in the number of tourist arrivals and in the number of nights tourists spent in Cagliari, which reached their peak prior to the COVID-19 outbreak (Figure 21). The pandemic determined a collapse in the variables examined, but they are rising again rapidly after the end of the lockdown. Observing the graphs reported in Figure 5, it is possible to notice the extraordinary growth of private accommodations and B&Bs. Indeed, while hotels saw increased and decreased business in the eight-year period between 2011 and 2019, and the values of arrivals and nights in 2019 are approximately the same as 2011 and slightly higher than 2008, private accommodations and B&Bs grew constantly and impressively in the same period [127].

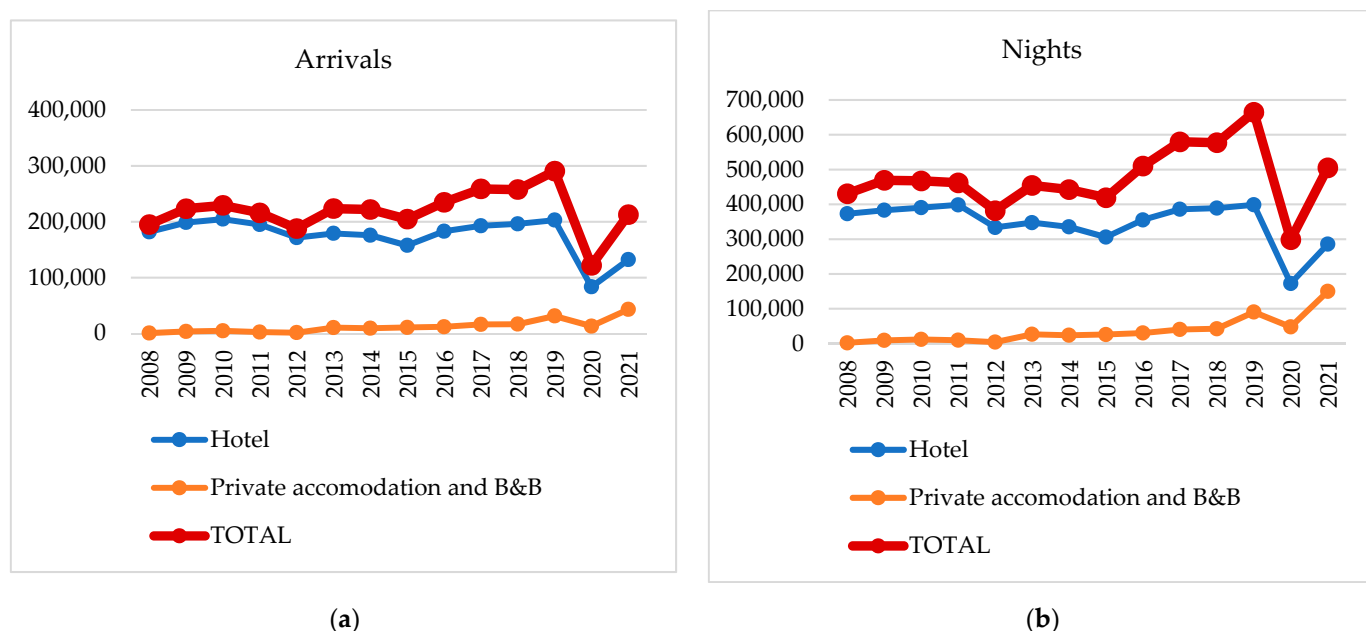


Figure 21. Tourism statistics: (a) arrivals in Cagliari; and (b) nights spent in Cagliari. Source: [127].

A closer look at the data (Tables 1 and 2) reveals an increase of almost 2000% in the number of arrivals, which grew from 1642 in 2012 to 31,379 in 2019 and of more than 2000% in the number of nights, which grew from 4083 in 2012 to 90,682 in 2019. The pandemic determined a steep fall in both the variables, but in 2021 they had completely recovered, hitting their highest point. The comparison of data from 2008 with data from 2021 reveals an increase of 5000% in the arrivals and of almost 7000% in the nights.

Table 1. Number of arrivals in Cagliari. Source: [127].

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Hotel	181,829	198,667	204,639	195,057	171,604	179,113	175,865	157,710	183,039	192,724	196,169	202,901	83,422	132,121
Private accommodation and B&B	827	3698	4836	2605	1642	10,663	9523	10,886	12,114	16,385	16,732	31,379	13,239	43,165
TOTAL	195,086	223,401	229,249	215,907	187,829	223,551	221,937	204,670	234,766	258,765	257,550	290,626	121,816	212,757

Table 2. Number of nights spent in Cagliari. Source: [127].

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Hotel	372,979	383,231	390,553	398,628	333,633	347,592	335,449	305,916	355,424	385,983	389,254	398,738	172,848	285,764
Private accommodation and B&B	2192	9190	11,911	9728	4083	26,811	23,864	26,070	30,494	40,574	42,562	90,682	47,829	150,070
TOTAL	430,898	469,260	467,653	462,061	381,993	454,466	442,563	419,277	510,040	579,750	577,309	664,966	298,763	505,272

The number of cruise passengers grew as well in the seven-year period between 2012 and 2019, after significant fluctuations (Figure 22). In 2020, it dropped dramatically due to the pandemic, and it reached its lowest point, but it is now gradually recovering.



Figure 22. Cruise passengers embarked, disembarked, and in transit in Cagliari. Source: [128].

The number of passengers travelling by ferry or by airplane from/to Cagliari grew constantly in the seven-year period between 2012 and 2019, especially in the triennium 2016–2019, due to the sharp increase in air passengers (Figure 23). With the outbreak of COVID-19, strict travelling limitations determined a catastrophic fall in the number of passengers, but it is now back on a growing trend.

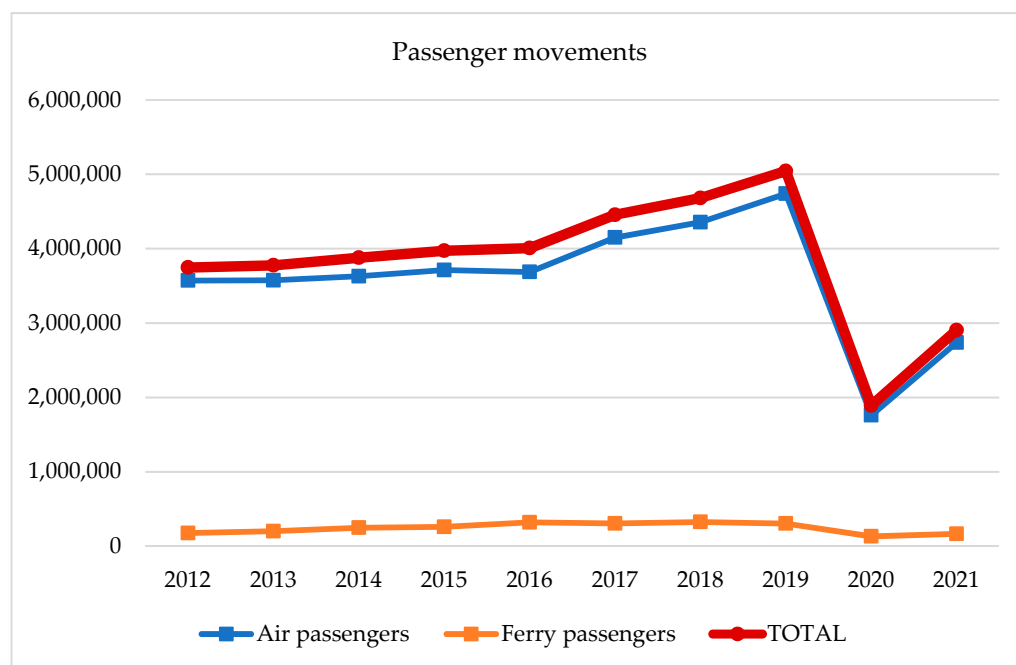


Figure 23. Passenger movements in Cagliari. Source: [128].

These encouraging growth rates are reflected in investments in the accommodation industry, which has experienced a rapid proliferation of holiday homes, guest houses, and bed and breakfasts, as shown in Figure 24.

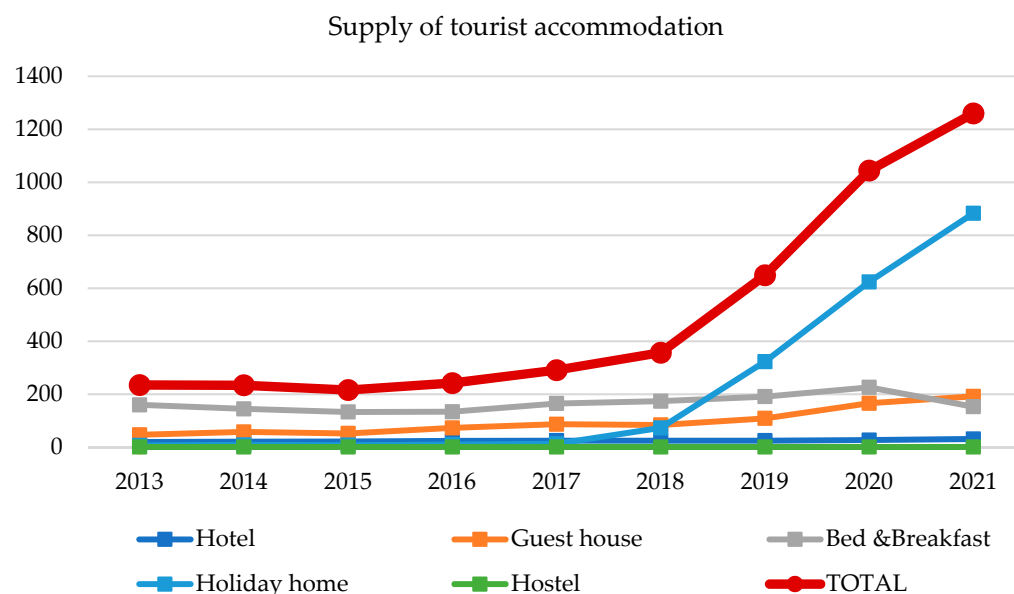


Figure 24. Trends in the supply of different types of tourist accommodation. Source: [129].

According to Airdna.co [130] there are now (January 2023) 1613 active listings, of which 65% are entire homes (Figure 25).

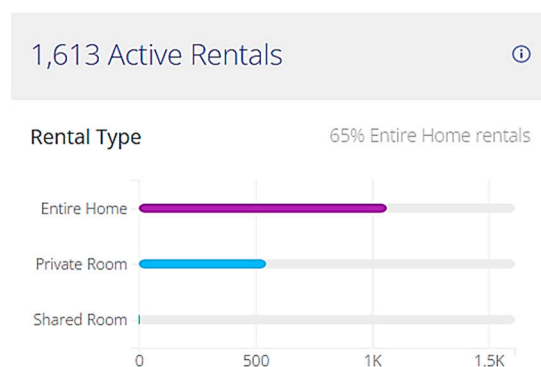


Figure 25. Active rentals of digitally-mediated private accommodations in Cagliari in January 2023. Source: [130].

The average occupancy rate of digital mediated private accommodations in 2022 was 67%, with a peak in August, when 90% of the listings are occupied, and a trough in December, when the ratio hardly exceeded the 32% (Figure 26).

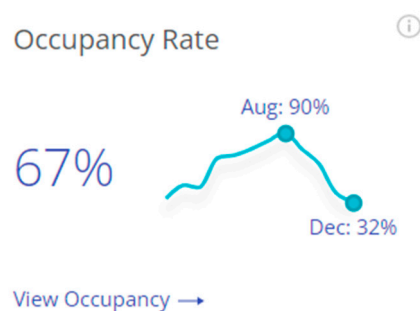


Figure 26. Occupancy rate of digital mediated private accommodations in Cagliari in 2022. Source: [130].

Similarly, the number of registered companies operating in the accommodation and food services sector grew progressively, while other segments, not related to tourism, experienced a reduction in the number of registered companies (i.e., transport/storage, information/communication, and sale and repair of personal and household goods) (Figure 27).

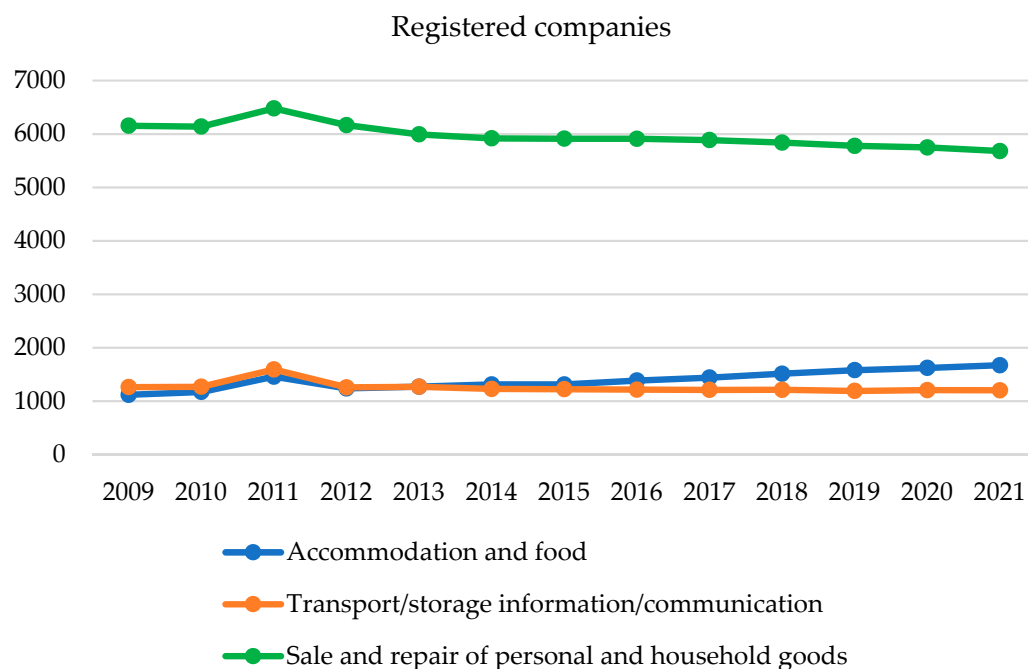


Figure 27. Number of registered companies in different businesses. Source: [127].

Residents of the four historic districts of Cagliari, exasperated by increasingly difficult living conditions, gathered together on 11 November 2022 to discuss the problems of the historic center and to identify possible measures to alleviate them. The flyers posted on all the walls of the city center to make the first inter-neighborhood meeting known open with the exclamation “THAT’S ENOUGH!” (translated by the author from the Italian “ADESSO BASTA!”) and lists a long, but not complete, series of issues that need to be urgently addressed (Figure 28).

The meeting attracted a strong turnout of inhabitants of the historic center, who expressed their displeasure and distress. It emerged that the four districts have many issues in common. One of the most popular is the lack of community spaces and services. Indeed, residents from all the districts agreed that the historic center is going through a process of Disneyfication, which is transforming it into a leisure-oriented consumption arena. Many streets have been closed to vehicles, but the freed space, rather than enriching car-free paths for pedestrians and bicyclists, has been infested by restaurant dehors, and by chairs and tables of outdoor bars and pizzerias. In this way, residents suffer, not only from the discomfort of the impossibility of arriving to their front door by car, but also from the disturbances created by the nightlife (noise, odors of restaurant kitchens, garbage left on the sidewalks and on the windowsills, etc.). In addition, residents reported the disappearance of small businesses that used to serve the local community, such as the grocer’s shop, the sewing shop and craft workshops, which have been replaced by souvenir shops and tourist stores.

When interviewed, the spokesman of local retailers and restaurateurs presented the ambivalent attitude of policy makers, who apportion responsibility for evading residents’ needs to business owners and, vice versa, apportion blame for eluding merchants’ requests to inhabitants.

The spokeswoman of the Castello community association reported that the already-scarce public transport is currently further worsened in the neighborhood, due to the elimination of some bus stops resulting from the erection of scaffolding, which reduces the width of the street, thus preventing the passage of the bus.



Figure 28. The flyer posted in the city center.

An inhabitant of Villanova stated that the main problem of the district is the high number of bed and breakfasts, which means that many residents left the neighborhood and that many people stay there for just a few days.

The spokesman of the Villanova community association warned that inhabitants do not feel welcomed in the transformed neighborhood, thus they sell their homes and move somewhere else. In this way, the historic center is being transformed into a big inn, a place to eat and sleep, deprived of its identity.

When walking around the city, it is possible to spot some private centers specifically intended to meet tourists' needs, in addition to the institutional offices that promote tourism in Cagliari and Sardinia. For example, in *La Marina* district there is "Innoi Sardinia", a tourist point and temporary shop, where tourists can get information and suggestions, rent a bike or a car, buy tickets for city attractions, book guided tours, buy local food and handcrafts and even stow their luggage. In the *Stampace* district, "STOREX SARDINIA Incoming Tourism Consulting & Promotion" organizes educational tours reserved to tour operators, journalists, opinion leaders and television personalities, along the various areas and cities of Sardinia. At the entrance to Villanova, the "SOS Tourist Medical Center" offers medical service to travelers 24/7, in agreement with the main insurance companies.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The case study analysis depicts a city that received a radical makeover to please the different types of tourists, thus becoming increasingly unwelcoming to residents. Transforming itself into what Sequera [56] defines as a “leisure-oriented consumption arena”, Cagliari lost the pleasures of long habitation and aroused a sense of *unhoming* in its former residents, as dreaded by Diaz-Parra and Jover [65] and Alexandri and Janoschka [64]. Thanks to its privileged location in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, Cagliari is easily accessible and a well-liked port of call for cruise itineraries. Aware of the city’s potentialities, the local council followed the example of many port cities, as illustrated by Andrade et al. and Pages Sanchez [9,116], working towards tourism development. To this end, beautification projects of the waterfront and of the historic center have been implemented and plans and policies to attract tourists have been formulated, copying the examples already developed in port cities worldwide [57]. Efforts devoted to increasing the attractiveness of the city have been demonstrated to be successful, according to tourism statistics. Indeed, tourist arrivals and nights spent in Cagliari increased, as well as air passengers and ferry passengers embarking, disembarking, and transitioning in Cagliari. The number of cruise passengers experienced a positive trend overall, even if characterized by some significant fluctuations, that, according to both the president of the port authority and the general director of Cagliari Cruise Port, are not alarming, since high volatility is intrinsic in the cruise sector and a characteristic of all ports [131,132].

However, development strategies, rather than balancing tourism promotion and local community needs, pandered to the rising touristification pattern, deliberately contributing to the amplification and acceleration of the touristification process that was as of yet in the bud. Coherently with the definition of touristification provided by Gotham [37], tourism became the driver of gentrification in Cagliari. Therefore, many of the challenges associated with overtourism, as dreaded in the literature, are today faced by Cagliari and its inhabitants. The most palpable is the physical transformation of the city, which became undoubtedly more appealing, but also more impersonal and anonymous, similar to thousands of port cities worldwide. As observed by Morris [70], Van Der Borg [71] and Connolly [72] in Sydney, Venice and Dubrovnik, respectively, the vast majority of historic little businesses serving the local community turned into souvenirs shops or were converted into food services, so that residents now experience severe difficulties in their daily lives. On the contrary, tourists find everything they wish and more in the heart of the city, even a medical center working 24/7, specifically designed for tourists. In this way, the cultural identity itself is undermined, as Macleod [73] warned.

Although figures show a flourishing economy based on tourism-related activities, residents’ quality of life, is anything but improved. Privatization of public space and the commercial gentrification depicted in the literature [67], are fully realized in Cagliari, infringing the quality of life of residents, as illustrated by Koens and Postma [33]. Indeed, the tourism-friendly road-closure initiatives to make way for restaurant dehors and bar tables have given residents great stress related to the noise, smell and garbage.

The result is obvious: as illustrated by Cocola-Gant and Gago [28], residents abandon the neighborhood and homeowners either substitute tenants with tourists or sell their houses to tourism entrepreneurs, who will transform them into B&Bs, thus further fostering the touristification process in an endless vicious circle. This results in a significant increase in the supply of tourism accommodation, which in the majority of cases consists of the entire house.

The promising prospects of the tourism industry have encouraged entrepreneurs investing in the sector, as demonstrated by variations in the number of registered companies in different businesses. This is also an aspect studied by scholars like Macleod [73], who argues that the working population leaves agricultural and manufacturing jobs and flocks to hospitality- and tourism-related positions.

Nonetheless, residents were exasperated by the increasing nuisances, so they organized themselves and invited all frustrated inhabitants to collaborate in identifying problems and possible solutions. The flyer saying, “THAT’S ENOUGH”, that they posted on the walls of the city center is emblematic of the annoyances that they cannot tolerate any longer.

Data examined also show a terrible crisis of tourism sector caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the latter’s dying down is now giving way to the return of overtourism. There is now a unique opportunity to reverse the touristification process and to get into a sustainable way of urban regeneration, which balances tourism development with social well-being and environmental protection, as required by the 2030 agenda.

This requires redefining tourism as a sustainable form of economic growth, one maintaining the right balance between living, working and visiting and minimizing the adverse impacts determined by tourist activities. Evidence emergent from this research leads to the formulation of the following policy recommendations.

First of all, the radical reconsideration of the role of housing is necessary. Properties need to return to providing accommodation for residents, rather than for tourists. To achieve this, it is necessary to reverse the process of home transformation into B&Bs, by making long-term rentals more profitable than short ones, through a system of incentives, penalties, and regulations. For example, heavy taxes should be applied on vacation rentals, while fiscal benefits should be provided to landlords who rent their property to long-term tenants.

In addition, public regulations should set the maximum nights which landlords can rent to tourists annually and should not grant permission to arrange short-term lettings in high rent-pressure areas to second property owners. In this way, all the dwellings that are not permanently inhabited would be forced to return to the long-term rental market in order to alleviate supply constraints in the housing market.

Simultaneously, efforts should be made to reduce unlicensed accommodations, which also raises issues of taxation and health and safety. Apart from detection measures, awareness-raising initiatives would serve the purpose. Moreover, public policies are needed to simultaneously provide security of tenure to tenants and title-holders against rent default and illegal occupation.

Secondly, to preserve the local cultural identity, it is necessary to counteract the monoculture of shops and facilities in the city center. To this end, the municipal authority should place a cap on shops targeting tourists and prohibit the opening of extra shops over that limit.

Thirdly, tourist crowds need to be properly managed. In order to reduce the pressure on overcrowded icons, daytrips should be discouraged, visitors should be offered alternative destinations, and seasonality should be reduced. Accordingly, guided tours should be promoted in less visited areas and events, celebrations, festivals, and cultural initiatives should be organized in off-peak season. The adoption of dynamic pricing discourages bookings in already popular areas at peak demand and, vice versa, fosters reservations in zones in low demand. In addition, it is beneficial to limit daily cruise ship arrivals, so that the city center is not clogged up by cruise passengers. Furthermore, a maximum number of participants in guided tours should be set, in order to avoid obstructing the narrow streets of the historic districts.

Fourthly, stakeholders, local communities, and grassroots organizations have to be involved in any decision-making process, from the very first steps, when strategic decisions are not taken yet, to the after-completion monitoring. Informal gatherings, festivals and events should be organized to stimulate active participation in relaxed contexts, which can facilitate networking and spontaneous collaboration. These recommendations are not exhaustive, and definitely not a panacea for overtourism issues in any city. On the contrary, each case study needs to be carefully analyzed and custom-made policies have to be tailored to fit the local context.

This site-specific study is of primary importance for the evaluation of the regeneration projects developed in Cagliari, but it would benefit from a complementary analysis of landscape changes that might detect reinvestment of capitals, thus strengthening the hypothesis of touristification. In addition, more quantitative and qualitative analysis that underpin the mechanisms and causes of outcomes observed would be beneficial. In particular, quantitative data analyzed in this study refer to the city of Cagliari as a whole. More deeply-probing studies based on the analysis of data referred to the various districts would allow for more accurate reflection. The pioneering approach illustrated in this study can be easily applied in other contexts, in order to compare a wide spectrum of case-study investigations, which would allow for generalization of findings, thus broadening the knowledge on the subject matter.

This study was conducted shortly after the halt of tourism flows caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic; it would be interesting to monitor the post-pandemic recovery to verify whether overtourism processes resurface or more sustainable models are adopted.

In addition, the analysis of different case studies located in similar Italian and international port cities would provide new insights and understanding of the mechanisms governing the processes of touristification. Comparison among diverse case studies would allow to better understand the role played by the various factors in determining sustainable urban regeneration or in fostering touristification, thus corroborating the effectiveness of the strategies here identified to shape vibrant neighborhoods, welcoming and livable, for both residents and tourists.

It would also be worthwhile to investigate how ICT and big data could support advancement in sustainable tourism, by monitoring policy impacts, smoothing the decision-making process, customizing the tourist offer and minimizing adverse effects of tourism development, thus creating opportunities for economic, social, and environmental development, as required by the 2030 agenda.

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